THE UNITED NATIONS ROLE IN THE CENTRAL AMERICAN PEACE PROCESS

The turmoil in Central America has been a matter of grave concern to the international community for many years. It aroused alarm particularly among the countries on the Latin American continent and prompted various peace initiatives. These initiatives were actively supported by the United Nations. Throughout these years, the Secretary-General has used his good offices to facilitate the Central American peace process. He has maintained intensive contacts with the Governments of the region and with other interested parties in an effort to find a political solution. After complex and difficult negotiations, the Presidents of five Central American countries (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua) signed a series of agreements in which they formulated the principal elements for a peaceful solution to the problems confronting the region. They also called on the United Nations to establish the following mechanisms for observing and verifying the commitments which they had undertaken and for assisting them in their implementation:

▸ **ONUCA—United Nations Observer Group in Central America**
A military observer mission originally established to verify compliance with the security commitments in the main Central American peace agreement. An armed battalion was later attached to the mission to undertake the voluntary demobilization of the Nicaraguan resistance between April and June 1990. During that time ONUCA is to monitor a cease-fire and separation of forces agreement, concluded between the Nicaraguan parties.

▸ **ONUVEN—United Nations Observer Mission for the Verification of the Elections in Nicaragua**
A civilian mission established at the request of the Government of Nicaragua to monitor and verify the recent electoral process in that country.

▸ **CIAV—International Support and Verification Commission**
Responsible for the civilian aspects—repatriation, relocation or resettlement—of the demobilization process of the members of the Nicaraguan resistance and their families.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In 1983, Colombia, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela—the so-called "Contadora Group" after a meeting of their Foreign Ministers on Contadora Island—initiated a series of consultations with the five Central American Governments in an effort to find a negotiated political solution to the problems affecting the region. In 1985, a Support Group was created by the Governments of Argentina, Brazil, Peru and Uruguay in order to strengthen the Contadora effort.

Initial United Nations Involvement

In May 1983, the Security Council adopted resolution 530 supporting the Contadora efforts and requesting the Secretary-General to keep the Council informed of developments. The following years, the Council met on several occasions to consider the situation in the region. Also in 1983, the item entitled "The situation in Central America: threats to international peace and security and peace initiatives" was placed on the agenda of the General Assembly. That year, in resolution 38/10,

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the Assembly expressed support for the Contadora Group, urging it to persevere in its peace efforts. The agenda item has been considered at each subsequent session of the General Assembly.

Since 1983, the Secretary-General has reported to both the Security Council and the General Assembly on developments in the area. He has also kept them informed of his frequent contacts and consultations with the Governments of the five Central American countries and with the Governments of the Contadora and Support Groups regarding a political solution.

In November 1986, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, and the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), Joao Clemente Baena Soares, extended a joint offer of services to the five Central American countries as well as to the eight Contadora and Support Group countries. In response, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Contadora and Support Groups requested the participation of both Secretaries-General in a visit to the five Central American countries. The visit took place in January 1987.

Esquipulas II Agreement

A breakthrough in the Central American peace process was achieved on 7 August 1987, when the Presidents of the five Central American nations signed the Guatemala Procedure, also known as Esquipulas II. The Central American Presidents undertook to launch a process of democratization in their countries, to promote a national dialogue, to decree a general amnesty, to bring about a genuine cease-fire, and to promote the holding of free, pluralistic and fair elections. They also requested all Governments concerned to terminate support for irregular forces or insurrectional movements and reiterated their commitment to prevent the use of their own territory for destabilization of other countries in the region.

To help achieve these objectives, the Presidents set up an International Verification and Follow-up Commission (CIVS) composed of the Foreign Ministers of the Contadora and Support Groups and of the Central American countries, as well as the Secretaries-General of the United Nations and of OAS. The five Presidents acknowledged the Commission's efforts in the Alajuela Declaration of 16 January 1988, signed at their summit meeting in Costa Rica.

Three important steps towards the implementation of the Esquipulas II agreements were taken by the five Presidents on 14 February 1989 when they signed the Costa del Sol Declaration. First, they requested their Foreign Ministers to arrange technical meetings to establish, with the participation of the United Nations, a mechanism for verification of the Esquipulas II security commitments. Second, the Government of Nicaragua announced its decision to call general and free elections, to amend its electoral laws and to invite international observers, in particular the Secretaries-General of the United Nations and of OAS, to verify that the election process was genuine at every stage. Third, the Presidents agreed to draw up a joint plan for the voluntary demobilization, repatriation or relocation of members of the Nicaraguan resistance and their families. They then requested technical advice from specialized bodies of the United Nations.

On 27 July 1989 in resolution 637, the Security Council welcomed Esquipulas II and other agreements made by the five Central American Presidents. It also lent its full support to the Secretary-General in his mission of good offices in the region.

The Tela Agreements

At the Tela, Honduras, summit meeting of 5-7 August 1989, the five Presidents signed a Joint Plan which provided for the voluntary demobilization, repatriation and relocation of the members of the Nicaraguan resistance and their families. In that context, an International Support and Verification Commission (CIAV) was to be set up by the Secretaries-General of the United Nations and OAS to assist in this process.

In its resolution 44/10 of 23 October 1989, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to afford the fullest possible support to the Central American Governments in

their efforts to achieve peace in the region. To assist him in discharging these responsibilities, the Secretary-General appointed Alvaro de Soto, Assistant Secretary-General in his Executive Office, as his Personal Representative for the Central American peace process.

UNITED NATIONS OPERATIONS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

▸ ONUVEN

ONUVEN was created as a result of the request made by the Government of Nicaragua on 3 March 1989. It constituted the first time the United Nations had monitored an electoral process in a sovereign State and represented the first major United Nations operation in the Western Hemisphere. ONUVEN officially opened its offices in Managua on 25 August 1989. The mission was carried out in three phases from August 1989 through February 1990 to coincide, first, with the organization and mobilization of political parties according to Nicaragua's election process timetable; second, with the electoral campaign proper; and third, with the elections themselves. The Secretary-General appointed Elliot Richardson, a prominent American lawyer, as his Personal Representative for the verification of the elections in Nicaragua.

Elections took place on 25 February 1990. Two hundred and seven ONUVEN observers travelled throughout Nicaragua to monitor the voting. They were assisted by a team of 34 persons stationed at the Managua headquarters and at the regional offices. The observers visited 2,155 polling stations in 141 of the 143 municipalities in Nicaragua. Assessing the electoral process, ONUVEN reported that it had been "impartial and fair throughout" and that the elections had been conducted in a "highly commendable manner". The "quick count" made by ONUVEN on election night enabled it to make a projection of the result within one percentage point of the final result by 9 p.m. of 25 February.

Upon request by both the President and President-elect of Nicaragua, the Secretary-General assigned a small team to assure a United Nations presence in Nicaragua during the transition period. This team played a role in various negotiations which followed the elections.

▸ ONUCA AND CIAV

ONUCA was established by the Security Council on 7 November 1989 in resolution 644 (1989) following a request from the five Central American Governments. Its original mandate called for verifying the countries' compliance with their undertakings to cease aid to irregular forces and insurrectionist movements in the region and not to allow their territory to be used for attacks on other States. On 12 December, the Central American Presidents, in a declaration signed at San Isidro de Coronado, Costa Rica, requested the Secretary-General to expand the mandate of ONUCA to include verification of any cessation of hostilities and demobilization of irregular forces that might be agreed in the region. Subsequently, shortly after the Nicaraguan elections of 25 February 1990 the Government of Nicaragua and the Nicaraguan National Opposition Union (UNO) asked the Secretary-General to consult with them about the manner in which ONUCA could assist in the transition process in that country. In the course of these consultations, agreement in principle was reached on the modalities for the voluntary demobilization of the members of the Nicaraguan resistance.

Accordingly, on 15 March 1990, the Secretary-General asked the Security Council to approve, on a contingency basis, an enlargement of the mandate of ONUCA and the addition of armed personnel to its authorized strength of 260 observers to enable it to play a part in the voluntary demobilization of the members of the Nicaraguan resistance. On 23 March, representatives of the President-elect of Nicaragua and the Nicaraguan resistance agreed, at Toncontín, Honduras, on the terms for the demobilization of the resistance forces. The parties declared their decision to initiate the general demobilization of the resistance, beginning with that of those resistance members still in Honduras. To this end, they

requested the co-operation and assistance of ONUCA and CIAV. The Security Council agreed to ONUCA's expansion on 27 March in resolution 650 (1990), adding some 800 troops to its strength and giving it the responsibility of taking delivery and disposing of the weapons, *matériel* and military equipment of the resistance. At a further summit meeting in Montelimar, Nicaragua, on 2 and 3 April 1990, the five Central American Presidents emphasized the urgent need for the immediate demobilization of the Nicaraguan resistance pursuant to the Joint Plan agreed at Tela and requested ONUCA and CIAV to take the necessary steps to ensure timely support for the demobilization and disarmament of the members of the resistance in Nicaragua, a process which was to be concluded no later than 25 April. They also agreed that the weapons to be received by ONUCA would be destroyed *in situ*. The voluntary demobilization of the Nicaraguan resistance in Honduras got under way on 16 April when members of the Atlantic Front (Yatama) of the resistance handed over their weapons and military equipment to ONUCA military personnel at La Kiatara, Honduras.

The mandate of ONUCA was again expanded by the Security Council on 20 April (resolution 653 (1990)), following an agreement which had been concluded in Managua two days earlier by the outgoing and incoming governments, by leaders of the Nicaraguan resistance and by the Archbishop of Managua. The expanded mandate enabled ONUCA to monitor a cease-fire and separation of forces agreed by the Nicaraguan parties as part of the demobilization process. According to the agreement, demobilization is to be completed by 10 June 1990.

On 4 May 1990, the Security Council decided to extend the mandate of ONUCA, as defined in the above-mentioned resolutions, for a period of six months until 7 November 1990.

The civilian aspects of the process, i.e. the repatriation, relocation or resettlement, were assigned to CIAV, which had been established on 6 September 1989 to implement the Tela Plan for voluntary demobilization. Its mandate included providing assistance to members of the resistance after demobilization, as well as to their families, their repatriation to Nicaragua and their resettlement there, and the follow-up of the guarantees offered to them by the Nicaraguan Government. On 18 April 1990, the Secretary-General appealed to the Member States to support the tasks of the United Nations, in the context of CIAV, and urged Governments to announce financial contributions. The Pledging Conference for CIAV took place at United Nations Headquarters on 25 April.

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Within the framework of the broader Central American peace process, the Secretary-General has exercised his good offices between the Government of El Salvador and the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN), deriving from Security Council resolution 637 of 27 July 1989. These efforts have intensified since January 1990. Since then, the Secretary-General, directly and through his Personal Representative Alvaro de Soto, has held consultations with both parties in order to agree on the format, mechanism and pace of a process aimed at bringing about a definitive end to the armed conflict in that country. At a joint meeting with the Secretary-General in Geneva on 4 April 1990, the parties agreed to end the armed conflict through political means as speedily as possible, promote the democratization of the country, guarantee unrestricted respect for human rights and reunify Salvadorian society. The parties agreed that the process should be carried out under the auspices of the Secretary-General in a continuing and ongoing manner through direct dialogue between the negotiation commissions with the active participation of the Secretary-General or his Personal Representative, as well as separate consultations with each of the sides, carried out by the Secretary-General's Representative. Direct talks began on 16 May in Venezuela.

Published by the United Nations Department of Public Information
DPI/1036—May 1990—4M

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